

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BOGOTA 011460

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/09/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [CO](#)

SUBJECT: URIBE'S CAMPAIGN TEAM PREPARES TO LEAVE

GOVERNMENT; INTERNAL POLLS SHOW LIKELY VOTE AT 73 PERCENT

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood.

Reason: 1.4 (b,d)

Summary

1. (C) President Uribe's communications advisor Jaime Bermudez said December 7 that Uribe advisor Fabio Echeverri would run the president's reelection campaign. He would be joined by Bermudez, Uribe private secretary Alicia Arango, spokesperson Ricardo Galan (all of whom would have to leave their government positions to join the campaign), and former Uribe advisors Jose Arango, and Alberto Velasquez. According to Bermudez, the campaign will highlight "democratic security," confidence in Uribe personally, and social issues. Uribe will present democratic security not as a goal in itself but rather as necessary to achieve peace with illegal armed groups. Echeverri would use a number of leading Uribe supporters to get out a coordinated message rather than select one spokesperson and risk upsetting others. Bermudez said his internal polls show Uribe's likely voter numbers at 73 percent. End summary.

Campaign Team Prepares to Leave Government

2. (C) Bermudez told Polcouns that Uribe has asked many of the people who ran his 2002 presidential campaign to organize his reelection effort beginning late January; most are still in government and will have to leave their posts before joining the campaign to comply with the Constitutional Court's Electoral Guarantees opinion that places severe restrictions on public employees' campaign activities. Uribe advisor Fabio Echeverri would head the campaign team and be joined by Bermudez, Alicia Arango, Ricardo Galan, and two former Uribe advisors, Jose Arango and Alberto Velasquez. Bermudez said he considered staying in his government position but realized that the Constitutional Court's restrictive Electoral Guarantees law ruling made the choice impossible; public sector employees cannot play any campaign role whatsoever, he said. Uribe will not replace the departing employees; rather, their deputies will take over through the election.

Campaign Themes and Challenges

3. (C) Bermudez said the campaign would focus on presenting Uribe as an ethical and hard-working president whose "democratic security" approach had paid off in lower rates of most major crimes and a greater degree of security for the vast majority of Colombians. The president would argue that "democratic security" was not an objective in itself, but rather was an essential base from which to address longer-term peace talks with illegal armed groups. The campaign would also highlight Uribe's success in tackling social issues and commit the next administration to do even more, he said. According to Bermudez, the campaign had no plans to use "negative" tactics but would not rule out responding to what Bermudez said was already an avalanche of negative attacks on Uribe.

4. (C) Bermudez said he expects the most significant opposition attacks to focus on paramilitary, free trade, and social policy matters. In his view, the Uribe campaign should be able to handle the attacks. Bermudez said his internal polls show Uribe's likely voter numbers at 73 percent.

Opposition: No Surprises

5. (C) Bermudez regards Horacio Serpa (Officialist Liberals); either Antonio Navarro Wolff (Independent Democratic Pole) or Carlos Gaviria (Democratic Alternative); and former Bogota mayor Antanas Mockus as Uribe's likely challengers. Bermudez said he was surprised that Mockus (whom he said was the strongest potential challenger in a second ballot) is running at only 2 percent in the polls. In Bermudez' view, Mockus is very intelligent and has played it correctly by not attacking Uribe and staying above the

political fray, but he has left his campaign very late. Bermudez said he was not concerned about former president Cesar Gaviria jumping into the race, about which rumors have begun circulating. With negative ratings hovering at 50 percent, he said, a Gaviria candidacy would not be troublesome.

Campaign Tactics

16. (C) Bermudez told polcouns the campaign would not have a "chief spokesperson" other than Uribe. Campaign chief Echeverri would instead work closely with leading Uribe supporters in Congress and elsewhere to ensure a coordinated message from the Uribe camp. A decision to "annoint" a spokesperson such as Juan Manuel Santos, coordinating Uribe's "Party of the U" movement, would likely cause problems with other leading Uribe supporters, he said.

Congressional Campaign - Comment

17. (C) Although Uribe can run for reelection as president in May simply by continuing to govern well, it is unclear what he will do to advance his allies in the March congressional election. Since there has not been reelection in modern times, there is no tradition of "coattails" or customary practice to guide him.
WOOD